

Will lawmakers stop own pay?

\$200 daily wage is waste of taxes, some representatives say

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Although state lawmakers haven't been working much lately, they're still getting paid nearly \$200 a day.

But legislative leaders may take a necessary step to stop collecting their special session pay, House Speaker Jody Richards said. The 16-member Legislative Research Commission is scheduled to meet on Friday and it may consider a plan that would allow lawmakers to forgo at least three weeks of pay, Richards said.

"It has been our position from the beginning that we did not want to be paid for any of this — what we thought was an ill-called special session," Richards said in a telephone call this week. "We do not want to be paid and we will do whatever we can in a reasonable sense to stop the cutting of the checks."

During legislative sessions — even including special sessions — state representatives get an extra \$250 allowance for stationery, while senators get \$500.

There are 100 members of the House and 38 senators.

When in session state legislators are paid, by law, at least \$180 per day plus about \$109 in daily expenses, according to the Legislative Research Commission. Higher ranking legislators get paid up to nearly \$226 per day.

That holds true during special sessions as well.

Gov. Ernie Fletcher called lawmakers into a special session in early July to deal with a number of issues, such as tax breaks for companies looking to build alternative energy power plants in Kentucky, a ban on domestic partner benefits for public university employees and funding for more than \$400 million worth of projects.

The Democrat-led House maintained the issues on Fletcher's agenda did not warrant the approximately \$60,000-per day special and adjourned without taking any action. Meanwhile, the Senate continued and passed legislation addressing Fletcher's special agenda.

Neither chamber, however, could agree on whether to adjourn.

Fletcher then signed an executive order postponing the session for three weeks until July 30. Lawmakers, however, are being paid during that time.

LRC director Bobby Sherman sent lawmakers a memo on July 9 that the LRC, which handles research and administration for the legislature, would continue paying lawmakers until both chambers adjourn the special session for good. Sherman noted in the memo that it would be up to the Legislative Research Commission — which consists of legislative leaders — to change the policy.

Lawmakers have had varied reactions to the pay issue.

State Sen. Ernesto Scorsone, D-Lexington, has sent letters to Sherman's LRC office and the state treasurer's office asking to forfeit his pay. Scorsone said in his letter that the special session had been "an exercise in wasting time and money."

Senate President David Williams, R-Burkesville, said "no one wants to get paid for days that they did not work" but doubted "very seriously" that the matter could be resolved Friday. Williams said he thought there were constitutional and statutory questions and was uncertain what the LRC could do as a panel to resolve the matter.

"It's the sort of thing that happens when people leave without thinking through what we're doing," Williams said of the House.

State Rep. Stan Lee, R-Lexington, said he was not sure whether the LRC would consider the plan on Friday. However, Lee said, it was possible that lawmakers could have already completed their work by now if the House had not adjourned when it did.

"The pay issue is a red herring," Lee said, adding that he would consider donating his to charity. "It's nothing more than a political ploy by House Democrats to try to shift focus from the fact that they walked away from the table."

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